Gt. Brit and Ireland – George III, King

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE BILL NOW PENDING IN PARLIAMENT, FOR THE BETTER SUPPORT AND MAINTENANCE OF THE POOR.

PREPARED FOR THE USE OF THE

TRUSTEES OF THE POOR

OF THE

PARISH of KENSINGTON,

AND PUBLISHED BY THEIR DIRECTION.

London:

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SOME OBSERVATIONS, &c.

ON a ſubject of ſo very extenſive, complicated, and delicate a nature, as that relating to the poor of this country, it is probably beyond the reach of human wiſdom to form any ſyſtem of regulations, which may not be liable to ſome objections. From the numberleſs branches, into which the ſubject neceſſarily divides itſelf, and the different claſſes and deſcriptions of perſons upon whom it operates, ariſing from the various occupations and purſuits of mankind in this buſy country, it ſeems almoſt impoſſible to form ſuch a ſyſtem for the management of the poor as may meet and provide for every caſe that may occur; and which, however ſuitable and beneficial it may

be as to one claſs or deſcription of perſons, may not only be inapplicable, but probably operate very injurioufly as to others.

Equally difficult is the taſk of drawing any definite line, between the affording to the poor a certain degree of right to that relief, which their ſituations really may require, and preſerving at the ſame time that degree of controul over them, which may put them to the neceſſity (at leaſt as to thoſe whoſe diſpoſitions may require that neceſſity) of firſt doing their own part towards their own ſupport. Every principle of humanity demands, that to the really indigent, neceſſitous, or impotent poor, a ſuitable relief ſhould be afforded: but however warmly and juſtly that principle may, and it is to be hoped ever will, animate the human heart, and intereſt its feelings, yet the rules of prudence and ſound policy require that the poor ſhould not be put into a ſituation, which may render them in any degree independent of their reaſonable labour.

To perſons who have been engaged in the management of the poor, eſpecially in extenſive and populous pariſhes, it is well known, that a very great portion of thoſe who are moſt preſſing and clamorous in their applications for relief,

relief, are, in fact, ſuch as are leaſt deſerving of it; perſons who, from idleneſs, drunkenneſs, debauchery, and other vices, actually bring themſelves into neceſſity, and are the immediate authors of their own diſtreſſes.

It is equally well known to perſons converſant with the ſubject that many of the lower ranks of labouring people, are very much prone to idleneſs and drunkenneſs; perſons, who will never work at all but when neceſſity compels them; and who, when they do work, are, however, conſtantly on the watch to take every poſſible advantage of their employers, and in proportion as the want of their ſervices, and their means of ſubſiſting without work, increaſe, become more unwilling to purſue it. In thus ſpeaking, however, of the lower or working claſs of people, it is by no means intended to implicate the generality of that induſtrious and valuable body; by far the greater portion of them are certainly of a character perfectly oppoſite, and are deſerving of every degree of protection and encouragement which a liberal country can beſtow. It is to the idle, the vicious, and the profligate only, that the obſervation is meant to be applied, but who are unfortunately far more numerous than the real friends of mankind could wiſh, and which ſerves to render the

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taſk of diſcrimination more difficult; and in a country depending, as this ſo much does, upon its manufactures, commerce, and agriculture, every thing which may contribute to weaken the principle of induſtry, and to diminiſh the proper labour of thoſe who are competent to it, ought carefully to be avoided.

It is a matter equally important and worthy of attention, that while gentlemen are exerciſing the amiable faculty of benevolence towards that claſs of the poor, which forms the immediate object of parochial relief, they ſhould not be unmindful of another deſcription of perſons, equally, or perhaps more, neceſſitous, but certainly not leſs deſerving than the other, that of the lower or middling houſe keepers; perſons whoſe ſituations oblige them to keep up a certain decency of appearance; many of whom are now obliged to contribute, in the payment of parochial rates, to that relief of others, of which they have probably more need themſelves; but who happen to be placed in that unfortunate ſituation, which while, on the one hand, it does not ſet them above the reach of want, yet, on the other, raiſes them a point or two too high to permit them to aſk the relief that want ſuggeſts. Theſe middling houſekeepers conſtitute, as is well known, by far the

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moſt numerous claſs of perſons in this country, and by whom the greateſt ſhare of its burdens is ſuſtained: to increaſe therefore the preſſure of thoſe burdens, under the idea of extending relief to thoſe orders of people next below them, is to perform an act of benevolence to one deſcription of poor, at the expenſe of a real, though unperceived, cruelty and oppreſſion upon the other. The title of the poor man's friend is certainly very grateful to every feeling mind; but the beſt friend to the poor is he who conſiders and provides for their real, ſubſtantial good, and in a way that is moſt conſiſtent with the general intereſts of ſociety.

To draw, however, the proper line in this reſpect, and to afford to the really indigent and deſerving that relief, and that comfort, which their neceſſities may require, and the principles of humanity may juſtly dictate, without, at the ſame time, opening the door to idleneſs and impoſition, is certainly a taſk of no ſmall difficulty and delicacy: and in conſidering, therefore, any plan propoſed for the amendment of the preſent ſyſtem of the poor in this country, due allowance ſhould be made for theſe difficulties, and for the impoſſibility of forming ſuch a plan as may be generally unexceptionable; the only

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ſucceſs to be hoped for, is to effect ſuch a ſyſtem as may be the moſt ſo.

Theſe general obſervations have been premiſed here, becauſe, in conſidering the bill now in queſtion, and its various proviſions, they will be found to be more or leſs applicable; and the previous ſtatement of which will therefore prevent the neceſſity of a more frequent repetition of them, in the ſubſequent examination of the bill.

The ends propoſed to be effected by this bill, as ſtated in the preamble, are "To amend and "enforce the laws for the relief, inſtruction, "and employment of the poor; in order, as "far as may be, to improve their condition, "and to inſure a more comfortable maintenance and ſupport to them and their families; "to encourage the general habits of induſtry "and good order, and thereby gradually to reduce the exceſſive amount of the poor rates."

The means by which theſe ends are propoſed to be obtained, are,

1ſt. To afford a certain weekly allowance, of not leſs than one ſhilling, for every child of a poor family beyond a given number, until every

ſuch extra child reſpectively can, and *ſhall* maintain itſelf.

2d. Perſons not able to earn the full rate of wages of the pariſh, and who ſhall engage to work for a leſs rate, ſhall have the deficiency made good, without being *compellable to do the pariſh work*; ſuch deficiency to be reimburſed, if the perſon has not a ſettlement in the pariſh.

3d. To authoriſe the purchaſing a cow, or other animal of profit, for any poor family, who might therewith maintain themſelves, without other relief.

4th. Perſons not to be excluded relief, on account of any tenement or cottage, with its appurtenances, or a certain extent of viſible property.

5th. Perſons not to be removed as actually chargeable, by reaſon of any relief afforded on account of any temporary diſability or ſickneſs.

6th. Perſons not ſettled in the pariſh where they reſide, not to be entitled to relief, but in the particular caſes ſpecified in the bill.

7th. To eſtabliſh parochial funds, on the principle of the friendly ſocieties, for the relief of ſickneſs, infirmity, and old age.

8th. To eſtabliſh ſchools of induſtry in different pariſhes, or united pariſhes, for the employment of the poor, and warehouſes for materials, under the direction of juſtices, viſitors, members of parliament, privy counſellors, commiſſioners of the land tax, perſons in holy orders, and certain perſons, to be appointed and qualified as in the bill are mentioned; under whom are to be guardians, managers, wardens, warehouſe-keepers, overſeers of the poor, &c. under the various regulations provided in the bill, the leading features of which ſeem to be theſe:

Houſes are to be provided for ſchools of induſtry; a warden of the poor, and manager of the ſchool of induſtry to be appointed; and the warden and overſeers are to be the managers of the poor.

All perſons wanting relief, are to be inſtructed and employed, either in ſuch ſchools of induſtry, or at their homes, according to rules to be eſtabliſhed with the conſent of two juſtices.

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A proper ſtock of materials and implements for work to be provided, and all perſons ſettled in the pariſh are to be entitled to be inſtructed and employed, according to their capacities, at the ſettled wages of the houſe.

Two juſtices may call for an account, and direct what ſtock ſhall be provided; and, in default, may levy the amount on the defaulter.

And if the earnings of ſuch perſons are not ſufficient for their ſupport, they are to have ſuch further relief as one juſtice may order.

All perſons not diligently inſtructing and employing their children at home, or in ſuch buſineſs as the managers of the poor ſhall direct, ſhall permit them (not being under five years old) to be ſent into the ſchool of induſtry; and children, whoſe parents are not able to maintain them, are likewiſe to be received and employed therein.

Perſons refuſing to work, or to permit their children to be employed, are not to be entitled to any other relief.

Every perſon reſiding in a pariſh may, when out of employment, apply for and have work at the uſual rate of wages, but to be *compellable* to do it.

Children, on obtaining certificates of their good behaviour, to be bound apprentices, or placed in ſervices.

Juſtices to regulate the price of wages, and to direct the providing of warehouſes and raw materials, and to give orders for preparing the ſame for manufacture, and proper warehouſe-keepers, artificers, and ſervants.

Subſcriptions to be received for any of the above purpoſes; and overſeers are empowered to borrow money on the rates, to purchaſe or hire land for building, contract for waſte ground, and for building ſchools of induſtry.

Viſitors to be guardians in rotation, under regulations by the juſtices. Officiating clergymen may inſpect the management, and report defects. Contracts for farming the poor to be invalid; but contracts may be made for food and materials, at ſtated prices, ſubject to juſtices, guardians, and viſitors. All the preſent

poor laws to remain in force, except as affected by this bill.

Theſe being the objects of remedy propoſed by this bill, each of them will be conſidered in its order, and ſome general obſervations will then be made on the whole, as applied to the particular objects propoſed in the preamble.

The firſt of theſe propoſitions, for providing a weekly allowance for every extra child of a poor family above a certain number, is certainly founded in beneficence; the miſerable ſtate of numerous poor children, whoſe parents cannot, or do not, provide ſufficiently for them, is ſhocking to humanity, and a ſuitable relief ought certainly to be allowed to them; ſeveral doubts, however, ariſe as to the propriety of affording that relief in the way propoſed. By the bill, as it now ſtands, this allowance appears to be almoſt a matter of abſolute right, in every family poſſeſſing the ſtated number of children, uncontroulable by any regulation; no effectual means are afforded of judging how far the family is, or is not, a proper object of the relief, or in what proportion it ought to be adminiſtered; how far the want of it may ariſe from real neceſſity, or from the indolence or miſconduct of the

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parent, in either not chuſing to work at all, or ſpending his earnings at a public-houſe, or in any other improper way; no means are afforded of obliging the parents, as a preliminary condition to the receiving of that allowance, to do their own part, as far as they can, to the ſupport of their own families; or to prevent their adding the propoſed allowance to the reſt of their profligate expenditure, and leaving their children as much expoſed as before; or the father, inſtead of purſuing diligently his daily labour, idling away juſt ſo many days as that allowance will ſupply, and working only during the remainder of the week. A diſcretionary power ought certainly to be lodged in ſome proper hands, to judge of, and regulate, thoſe allowances, according to the particular circumſtances of the family. In the words, in the concluding part of that clauſe, "until "ſuch child or children can and *ſhall* maintain "themſelves," the words "*and ſhall*" ſhould certainly be omitted. If the allowance be continued till the children *can* maintain themſelves, it follows that then they *ſhould* do ſo, and that they ſhould be impelled thereto, by the allowance ceaſing.

The ſecond propoſition, however apparently founded in a humane principle, ſeems to be of a na-

a nature very indefinite in its operation, and ſubject to conſiderable abuſe in practice. The natural inclination of many of the working claſs of people, to ſhift off the burthen of labour as much as they can, already inclines that deſcription of them to lay hold of every poſſible pretext for ſo doing; to add to that propenſity, by any additional allurements, would be only to increaſe that natural tendency to idleneſs, and to render them ſtill leſs dependent on their own labour; of ſuch a tendency is, certainly, the proviſion in queſtion; for though it, in terms, goes only to ſuch perſons as *cannot* earn the full rate of wages, yet, beſides the difficulty of determining, eſpecially in the neighbourhood of great and opulent towns, what is the full rate of wages, where they are ſubject to no fixed or regular ſtandard, it is alſo equally difficult to determine what that ſituation of a labouring man is, by which his inability to earn thoſe full wages is to be aſcertained; and when, to that natural unwillingneſs to labour, is added the inducement of getting the deficiency made good by the pariſh, a thouſand idle pretexts will be conjured up, and innumerable artifices practiſed, to gain the benefit of that allowance, and thereby to withhold an eſſential portion of their regular and proper induſtry,

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excluſive of the encouragement it affords them for withdrawing from their uſual labour and occupation, in the ſervice of their proper maſters and employers.

The third propoſition, for buying a cow, pig, or other animal of profit, ſeems to be more humane and good in theory than applicable in practice: the various abuſes to which it would be liable, the continued and clamorous applications which would be made for the object of it; the various idle ſtories and pretexts which would be invented as excuſes for aſking it; the diſcontents and jealouſies to which any diſtinction in that reſpect would give birth; the inducement it would be, if obtained, of ſpending the ſavings from it in ſome idle way, and, after all, the difficult means of keeping the animal, when obtained; its liability to die, or be loſt, ſold, or made away with; all theſe circumſtances will moſt probably tend, in too many inſtances, to defeat the liberal intention of the propoſal; and however this meaſure may be calculated to ſuit the cottager, living at the ſide of a common, it is wholly inapplicable as to all other deſcriptions of poor whatever, and eſpecially that numerous claſs of poor, the mechanics, artificers, and labourers, in great towns: its operation muſt therefore be

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extremely partial, and the expenſe of it, even in that limited ſcale, muſt be much too great, and the ſucceſs of the experiment too hazardous, in proportion to that expenſe, to be of any real utility.

The fourth propoſition, for affording relief to poor perſons, notwithſtanding their poſſeſſing a certain deſcription, or extent of property, is perfectly juſt and proper. It is a principle extremely cruel, that perſons, under a temporary preſſure of want, ſhould be obliged to part with the laſt article of their property before they ſhall be allowed to aſk a relief which, if ſeaſonably applied, might probably prevent that neceſſity. Though this principle is very ſeldom adopted in practice, yet reaſon and juſtice demand that no ſuch principle ſhould exiſt at all. As to this proviſion, however, it ſhould not be left in its preſent indefinite ſtate; a diſcretionary power ſhould be lodged ſomewhere, of judging of, and regulating this mode of relief alſo, according to the particular circumſtances of the caſe; the nature and extent of the property ſhould be more certainly defined; the tenement or cottage, with its appendages, ſhould be of ſome limited yearly value, and the extent of the other property ſhould be aſcertained, by ſome more certain

rule than can be drawn from thoſe looſe terms, "any other viſible property."

Equally juſt and proper is the fifth proviſion, that perſons ſhall not be removed on account of any diſability, of a nature merely temporary; Mr. Eſte's bill, paſſed the laſt ſeſſion, has relieved this evil very much, by providing that no perſon ſhall be removed till actually chargeable, nor during any ſickneſs, or incapacity to travel; but the preſent bill goes (not improperly) a ſtep farther, and provides that no perſon ſhall be removed at all, on account of any ſuch temporary diſability. It ſhould ſeem, however, that a diſcretionary power of judging in this reſpect ought alſo to be placed in ſome proper hands, and that the relief afforded ought to be reimburſed by the pariſh to which the perſon receiving it may belong, the pariſh giving the relief obtaining, with the order for ſuch relief, an order, adjudging the ſettlement for a reimburſement, and delivering, within a ſhort period afterwards, copies of ſuch orders to the pariſh, upon which the adjudication and order of reimburſement are made; ſuch adjudication and order to be ſubject to the uſual appeal, as in caſes of actual removal. It will certainly be leſs inconvenient, in all reſpects, to deliver copies of ſuch orders

ders than to remove the object of them; and the reimburſement may be enforced in a ſummary way, as in Mr. Eſte's bill before alluded to. Such a proviſion will always operate as an inducement to avoid removals, by its affording an eaſier and leſs expenſive remedy; and may, therefore, often prevent them, where they might otherwiſe have been unavoidable; beſides avoiding, in many caſes, the painful neceſſity of haraſſing the poor about from place to place, merely on account of their wanting ſuch relief.

The ſixth proviſion, that perſons not ſettled in the pariſh where they reſide ſhall not be entitled to any relief, but in the particular caſes ſtated in the bill, ſeems ſcarcely intelligible: in the firſt place, no regulations appear in the bill tending to determine in what caſes perſons, not ſettled in the pariſh, in which they reſide, are, or are not to have relief; nor can any rules be properly formed by which ſuch caſes can be determined. Every perſon who *actually* wants relief, ought certainly to have it, at leaſt to the extent of the real neceſſity of the moment, be the cauſe of the event what it may; if the want ariſe from miſconduct, the object may be ſuitably puniſhed; or, if he remain improperly burthen-

ſome on a pariſh to which he does not belong, he may be removed to that, to which he does belong; but in no poſſible caſe ought relief to be altogether denied, where a poſitive neceſſity for it really exiſts. Is the object to periſh for want, only becauſe, through ſome miſconduct of his own, however atrocious it may have been, or ſome infringement of parochial regulations, he may have forfeited a regular claim to it; eſpecially if, as it frequently happens, his own proper pariſh be at a very conſiderable diſtance?

The ſeventh propoſition, for eſtabliſhing parochial funds, on the principle of the friendly ſocieties, is certainly exceedingly good in its nature; how far it may be applicable in practice, in every pariſh, is a matter of ſome doubt, but of which no judgment can properly be formed, till the regulations in the ſchedule, referred to by the bill, are ſeen. It ſeems very doubtful, however, if that plan will ever become ſufficiently extenſive to be of any eſſential uſe, eſpecially among the lower ranks of working people, while it depends upon their mere voluntary ſubſcriptions. Many of the latter deſcription will be found unwilling to afford any part of their preſent earnings to any future object, however valuable or important;

tant; they will much rather ſpend any extra money, which might be ſo applied, in an additional pot of beer, or other gratification of the moment, eſpecially knowing, as they do, that in times of ſickneſs or inability to work, their pariſhes muſt relieve them. If by any mode, either of neceſſity or inducement, any ſmall portion of their earnings could be applied to ſuch an object, it might, no doubt, become of material uſe, and the good effects which theſe people would themſelves experience from it, would, in time, reconcile them to it. M. Vancouver, in his ingenious treatiſe on the Cauſes of, and Remedy againſt Poverty, has treated this part of the ſubject with great ability, and has ſhewn, by accurate calculations, how a very ſmall portion, indeed, of the earnings of individuals, regularly collected and diſpoſed of, would afford, to every claſs of ſociety, a very comfortable relief and aſſiſtance, in caſes of debility, and even an actual independence in old age, far beyond what can be afforded from the poor rates, though the latter are infinitely more burthenſome; and although, upon the very general and extenſive ſcale propoſed by that gentleman, his plan may be ſomewhat difficult of execution, yet the principle of it ſeems highly deſerving of attention, and might in time, if properly applied,

plied, be of infinite utility, and leſſen conſiderably the burthen of the poor rates.

The propoſition for eſtabliſhing ſchools of induſtry, and providing proper tools, implements, and materials for employing and inſtructing the poor, and all the various regulations propoſed in the bill for carrying that ſyſtem into effect, come next under conſideration.

The object of affording employment to ſuch of the poor as are capable of work, and of training up children in habits of induſtry, morality, and religion, is certainly extremely judicious and proper: it ſeems very doubtful, however, whether, under the extenſive and complicated arrangements propoſed in this bill, that deſirable end can be anſwered to any uſeful purpoſe; the taſk of controuling and directing its operations is put into too many hands, and ſubjected to too many intricate forms, to be properly attended to by any body; while thoſe who are to have the immediate execution of them, in the characters of wardens, managers, warehouſe-keepers, &c. will, from not being ſufficiently controuled in their conduct, by thoſe whoſe buſineſs it will be to do ſo, be enabled to convert thoſe undertakings into mere jobs, for their own private emolument,

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at an enormous expenſe to the pariſhes, and without producing any adequate good effect.

The powers veſted in the magiſtrates are alſo, as to many of them, far too extenſive; of this nature is the clauſe enabling any two juſtices of the diſtrict to order whatever quantity of materials for the ſchools of induſtry they may think fit, under a heavy penalty in caſe of diſobedience. The powers alſo for regulating the prices of work and materials are alſo very extenſive, if not impracticable. At all events, this ſyſtem muſt neceſſarily be attended with a very heavy expenſe, and be highly uncertain as to its general operation and effect. Some of the proviſions alſo, with reſpect to the poor people, are likewiſe very ſingular: by the 17th ſection it is provided, that all perſons, ſettled in the pariſh, ſhall be *entitled* to have work, and to be inſtructed at theſe eſtabliſhments, at the regulated prices, or wages; and if their earnings thereby are not ſufficient, they are, by the 19th ſection, to have ſuch further relief as any one juſtice ſhall chooſe to order; ſo that any perſon, who, from any improper motive, may not chooſe to purſue his ordinary labour or occupation, may, if he can invent any idle pretext, or plauſible artifice, for ſo doing, come to theſe ſchools of induſ-

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try, and inſiſt on having other work given to him there, and the deficiency of the uſual earnings of his own proper work made good by the pariſh, while the buſineſs of his maſter or employer is probably ſtanding ſtill for want of his ſervices.

The powers given by the 20th ſection to the managers, to ſend into the ſchools of induſtry all ſuch children as are not employed and inſtructed at home, in the manner which theſe managers ſhall think fit to direct, and to their own individual ſatisfaction, ſeems much too extenſive and arbitrary. Who theſe managers may be, cannot poſſibly be foreſeen; and to give to ſuch men, whoever they may be, the power of dragging children from their parents and their homes, as their caprices may think fit to ſuggeſt, is not only too arbitrary and improper, but wholly repugnant to thoſe ties of nature, which unite parents to their offſpring, and to the manifeſt dictates of common humanity. A power lodged ſomewhere, of taking up and providing for young children, who are actually abandoned by their parents to dirt, neglect, and wretchedneſs, may, no doubt, be very proper; but then it ſhould be lodged in much better hands than theſe managers or wardens, and be reduced to ſome rule or ſome ſtandard

more certain and definite than the mere will of any individual whatever. This proviſion ſeems alſo wholly inconſiſtent with the firſt clauſe of the bill, which gives an allowance to theſe poor families, in reſpect of their extra children, beyond a certain number.

Equally ſevere ſeems to be the next clauſe, ſection 21, which provides, that no poor perſon, who ſhall refuſe to do any work offered, which he is capable of executing, or to permit his family to be employed in the ſchool of induſtry, at the will of the ſaid managers or wardens, ſhall be entitled to any other relief: many caſes will conſtantly occur, in which poor families may want relief, which it would be very hard to refuſe them, but upon the painful condition of their abandoning their homes, and uſual work or occupation, for ſuch work as the managers of theſe ſchools of induſtry may chooſe to put into their hands.

Upon the whole, it ſeems difficult to reconcile the rigid conditions, under which the poor are to be made liable to this ſyſtem of work in the ſchools of induſtry, with the humane and extended principles upon which relief is propoſed to be afforded to them by the former clauſes of the bill.

Conſidering, therefore, this bill under thoſe two objects, viz. that of affording relief to the poor at their homes, and that of providing for their employment in theſe ſchools of induſtry, it appears that the proviſions of it are, as to many of them, ſuch as may tend to render the idle and profligate part of the lower claſſes of labouring poor too much independent of that neceſſity for making the beſt uſe they can of their own labour and exertion, which the intereſts and regularity of ſociety ſo ſtrongly require; and as to thoſe of a better deſcription, to make the conditions of their having relief much too preſſing and ſevere, and conſequently tending to fruſtrate that diſtinction which ought always to be preſerved between the one deſcription of poor and the other: that however, therefore, thoſe proviſions may ſeem likely, in one point of view, to ameliorate the condition of the poor, and ſecure them a more comfortable ſupport, and to encourage the general habits of induſtry and good order, yet that, in fact, they have a tendency to produce ultimately the reverſe of thoſe effects. It is likewiſe well known, that by far the greater number of thoſe who are ſupported by pariſh aſſeſſments, are children, aged people, and perſons incapacitated for work, by ſickneſs or other corporal inability, and who cannot poſſibly have any other

other home or exiſtence than their pariſh may provide for them. Very few of them are, or at leaſt ought to be, perſons capable of earning their ſubſiſtence by their perſonal labour; yet it is to the latter deſcription only that nearly the whole of the ſyſtem goes, while ſcarcely a word of proviſion is contained in it, with reſpect to the former. It is for the latter only that this expenſive and complicated ſyſtem is propoſed to be adopted, and no attention whatever ſeems to have been paid in it, to that other deſcription of perſons, who are far more fit objects of public benevolence. The one can obtain their ſubſiſtence if they pleaſe, and ought to be impelled to it by neceſſity at leaſt, when all other motives fail, while the other have no alternative, but to throw themſelves upon the public bounty. The bill, while it propoſes to improve the condition of the poor in general, goes in effect to improve the conditions of thoſe only, who have the leaſt claim to that improvement, the idle, diſorderly, and abandoned, and to render them ſtill leſs dependent upon that labour and exertion, which they ought to uſe for their own ſupport, while it leaves the condition of thoſe who have no other home or proviſion than what the public bounty may beſtow, in the ſame, or

perhaps, in a worſe ſtate than they were before.

With reſpect to the effect of this plan in reducing the poor rates, it ſeems impoſſible to imagine from whence that reduction is to ariſe; for, by the various modes of pecuniary relief to be afforded, the ordinary expenſes of the poor muſt neceſſarily be very much increaſed; and as to the operation of the propoſed ſyſtem for eſtabliſhing ſchools of induſtry, one thing is certain, that it muſt neceſſarily be attended with a very conſiderable expenſe: and, admitting for a moment that the profits to be derived from the earnings of the poor in thoſe houſes ſhould be as extenſive as the moſt ſanguine imaginations can expect, let it be aſked, how thoſe earnings can poſſibly amount to a reimburſement, even of the ordinary expenſes of their ſupport, much leſs of the vaſt expenſe which muſt neceſſarily attend their firſt eſtabliſhment: but if, inſtead of affording thoſe advantages, theſe inſtitutions ſhould happen, as it ſeems by no means improbable, to fail altogether in producing them, either from their own radical defects, or from the want of due attention being paid to them by the numerous viſitors and guardians who are appointed to controul them, the conſequences of the great

expenſe

expenſe to be incurred in their eſtabliſhment are too ſerious to be contemplated without the utmoſt anxiety; and when it is conſidered on whom the burden of all this expenſe is to fall, namely, the very numerous claſs of the middling ranks of people, who are ill able to bear the weight of the parochial aſſeſſments for the poor already exiſting, ſurely gentlemen will pauſe a moment and reflect ſeriouſly upon the ſubject, before they attempt to introduce into practice a ſyſtem of ſo complicated and ſo extenſive a nature, ſo uncertain in its ſucceſs, and attended, as it muſt be, with ſo vaſt an expenſe, and tending to increaſe, in ſo material a degree, and at beſt for a conſiderable length of time, that burden.

There is, however, one deſcription of pariſhes to which all the proviſions of this bill ſeem wholly inapplicable, namely, ſuch as poſſeſs local inſtitutions of their own for the management of their poor, under the authority of ſpecial acts of Parliament obtained for that purpoſe; under the ſanction of which, and the regulations adopted in conſequence thereof, every wholeſome proviſion, and every poſſible advantage, as well to theſe pariſhes as to the poor, have been obtained, which the preſent, or

indeed any bill whatever, can be reaſonably expected to afford. Workhouſes have been erected, in which the aged, infirm, and impotent poor, are comfortably provided; children are carefully brought up in habits of induſtry and good conduct, are taught to read, write, and work, and, when at proper age, are placed out as apprentices, or in reputable ſervices; perſons of vicious habits have every means uſed for their reformation, and ſuch as are capable of work, but who, from unavoidable cauſes, cannot poſſibly obtain it elſewhere, have employments ſuited to their various capacities, ſo as to earn a material portion of the expenſe of their ſubſiſtence; to the aged or neceſſitous poor, and ſuch as have numerous families, by whom ſome degree of aſſiſtance may be wanted, but without their being altogether dependent upon the pariſh, that degree of aſſiſtance is afforded by weekly penſions, ſuited to their ſeveral ſituations; and to thoſe who, from temporary cauſes, happen to ſtand in need of occaſional relief, aſſiſtance is likewiſe afforded ſuited to their wants; the regulation of all which is committed to the care, not merely of pariſh officers promiſcuouſly appointed every year, or of one or two individual wardens or managers, controulable by ſo many deſcription of perſons,

and

and under ſo many difficult modes, as to be moſt probably, in fact, controuled by nobody, but of gentlemen of the firſt property and reſpectability in the reſpective pariſhes; perſons who have not only a material intereſt in the ſucceſs of theſe inſtitutions, but who are alſo, from their ſituations and habits of life, enabled to feel and to provide properly for the wants and neceſſities of their fellow creatures, and at the ſame time to detect and reſiſt fraud and impoſition, repreſs and diſcourage idleneſs and vice, and to diſcriminate properly between the meritorious and the undeſerving poor, and to apply that ſort of relief or proviſion which may be beſt ſuited to the nature of every particular caſe, according to the extenſive and endleſs variety of them, which are conſtantly occurring: the beneficial effects of theſe inſtitutions have been abundantly felt, not only in the comforts and advantages they have afforded to the poor themſelves, but alſo in the very eſſential reduction of the ordinary amount of the poor rates.

Pariſhes ſo circumſtanced will ſurely be thought proper objects of exemption altogether from the operation of the preſent bill. They are indeed, by the 52d ſection, exempted from the

the neceſſity of building or hiring ſchools of induſtry, having already ſuch eſtabliſhments; but, by the 54th ſection, they are ſubjected to all the other regulations and proviſions of the bill, to juſtices, viſitors, wardens, managers, warehouſe-keepers, &c. and the poor to all the proviſions and modes of relief contained in the bill. To what end ſuch pariſhes ſhould be made liable to all that complicated ſyſtem, and the exceſſive expenſe and inconvenience it will neceſſarily incur, in addition to that, which they have already ſuſtained, in eſtabliſhing their own inſtitutions, it ſeems impoſſible to imagine: every good purpoſe propoſed by this bill is already effected in thoſe pariſhes, to the utmoſt poſſible extent, and which the proviſions of this bill can only tend to unhinge and confuſe.

It is hoped, therefore, that whatever the legiſlature, in its wiſdom, may ſee fit to do, with reſpect to the operation of the bill in pariſhes in general, yet, that as to ſuch pariſhes as poſſeſs thoſe local inſtitutions, they, and the poor belonging to them, will be left in the uninterrupted enjoyment of the benefits they have hitherto ſo happily experienced under them, by a total exemption from the proviſions of the bill.

It is, however, a far eaſier taſk to find out objections to any plan to be propoſed, than to point out the means by which thoſe objections might probably be obviated, or to propoſe a better; it would be an idle preſumption to ſuppoſe that any thing to be ſuggeſted here can have any ſuch tendency. In conſidering, however, the preſent bill, ſome obſervations have occurred, which, without meaning to vouch for their propriety, it is hoped it will not be deemed too preſuming, merely to ſuggeſt. It ſeems to be a principle, confirmed by conſtant experience, that in no caſe whatever ſhould a poſitive right to relief ſubſiſt in the poor themſelves; for, though innumerable caſes may be eaſily conceived, and indeed daily occur, in which the poor ought certainly to have proper relief, yet it appears to be utterly impoſſible to lay down any fixed rules for that purpoſe, applying generally to the whole kingdom, and which may not be liable, in many inſtances, to conſiderable inconveniencies and abuſe; nor can any fixed rules be applicable to every poſſible caſe. The ſafeſt and the beſt mode may probably be, to veſt a general diſcretionary power in ſome proper hands, to judge of and regulate the modes of relief, according to the particular circumſtances of the people

and the country; and if that be ſo, the material queſtion will be, in what hands that diſcretion may be moſt ſafely and prudently lodged? In the hands of thoſe perſons, undoubtedly, who will be the moſt likely to attend properly to the ſubject, and to feel and provide for the real wants and neceſſities of the poor, and, at the ſame time, to regard the general intereſt and order of ſociety in that particular. That ſuch a diſcretion ſhould not remain in the hands of mere pariſh officers, caſually choſen every year, too many reaſons abundantly occur. Without, however, travelling to foreign nations for a guide in this reſpect, the ſeveral local inſtitutions for the management of the poor, in particular pariſhes and diſtricts in this country, afford, by their example and effects, the beſt ſuggeſtions for a general plan of management of the poor throughout the kingdom, in a way better ſuited, perhaps, to its genius and character, than any eſtabliſhments of that kind abroad, however beneficial the latter may be, according to the circumſtances of the countries, in which they exiſt. Thoſe inſtitutions here, very ſtrongly indicate what may be done by well-regulated eſtabliſhments of that kind: from the example theſe afford, it ſhould ſeem that, inſtead of the complicated ſyſtem of juſtices, viſitors, guardians,

dians, wardens, managers, &c. propoſed by the preſent bill, the rector, vicar, or other incumbent, and a certain proportion of the principal inhabitants of every pariſh, poſſeſſing a certain extent of property therein; and, as to ſmall pariſhes, uniting ſeveral of them together for the ſame end, might be appointed truſtees or guardians of the poor, in their reſpective pariſhes or diſtricts, compelled to act in a certain rotation, and poſſeſſing full diſcretionary powers for the relief and management of the poor, in the way which they may find beſt ſuited to the particular circumſtances of the people and neighbourhood, and the real wants and neceſſities of the poor. The ſituations in life of thoſe perſons would render them ſuperior to denying the poor that relief and comfort which their ſeveral wants might really require, while the intereſt they would have in the well ordering of the poor, and their knowledge of their general characters and conditions, would enable them to detect and reſiſt fraud and impoſition, to repreſs idleneſs and vice; and as to ſuch as are really able and willing, yet from ſome cauſe or other in fact cannot get work, in any other way; to provide for their maintenance and employment, in a manner beſt ſuited to their ſituations, and the general circumſtances of the neighbourhood, but for which, it is impoſſible

ble that any fixed general rules can properly be preſcribed. To guard, however, againſt any oppreſſion of the poor in theſe reſpects, power might be given to the magiſtrates, as at preſent, to order relief, where it may be improperly denied; and appeals may be allowed to the ſeſſion againſt any thing to be injuriouſly or improperly done by thoſe truſtees. It ſhould ſeem that a plan, founded upon ſome ſuch principle as this, might be rendered far more ſimple in its operation, leſs expenſive, and more likely to produce the good ends deſired, than the expenſive arrangements propoſed by the preſent bill.

There is alſo another point of view, in which the ſyſtem of the poor of this country ſtands much in need of reformation, and that is, in the preſent very complicated ſyſtem of the poor laws, particularly ſuch of them as relate to ſettlements and removals; from the multiplicity of niceties into which the various acts of Parliament hitherto paſſed upon the ſubject, and the many refinements which the various deciſions of the courts of law upon thoſe acts have introduced, thoſe branches of the poor laws have become peculiarly intricate and perplexed, ſo that however intelligible they may be to lawyers, they are certainly very little ſo to

perſons

perſons of inferior diſcernment and capacities, upon whom, however, the taſk of conforming to thoſe laws pretty generally reſts, and the want of a competent underſtanding of which is a conſtant ſource of vexation and expenſe, by means of which the poor are perpetually haraſſed about from place to place without end. It might have been (perhaps not unreaſonably) hoped that a plan for reforming the general ſyſtem of the poor, proceeding from ſuch high authority and diſtinguiſhed talents, as the preſent bill is ſanctioned with, would have propoſed ſome arrangement, tending to ſimplify that eſſential branch of it, and by which more real good would be obtained, both to pariſhes and the poor, than can be hoped for, from any ſpeculative theories for their management, however promiſing or ſpecious. The taſk of reforming the poor laws, however deſirable in itſelf, is probably thought to be too much of an an Herculean labour to be attempted in the preſent ſtate of things. The ſubject is, no doubt, of a very delicate and important nature, and great and apparently ſerious difficulties muſt neceſſarily occur in ſuch an undertaking; but however diſcouraging thoſe difficulties may appear to be, yet the manifeſt neceſſity of the meaſure, and the eſſential good which would ariſe from its adoption, ſeem to require that it

ſhould not be wholly overlooked or thrown aſide; though many of thoſe difficulties will, to perſons at all acquainted with the ſubject, appear in a ſtriking point of view, yet a little attention and conſideration will perhaps enable them to ſee thoſe difficulties in a light not quite ſo ſerious as may, at firſt ſight, be imagined. A recurrence to the original fundamental principles upon which the law of ſettlement is founded, will, it is conceived, readily ſuggeſt the means of its ſimplification. It would too much exceed the proper limits of theſe obſervations to enter fully into the ſubject; one or two leading points may however be ſuggeſted, upon which the ground of ſuch a ſimplification might probably be laid. And firſt, as to the ſettlement by ſervice, the leading principle of that ſort of ſettlement is, that the pariſh, which has had the benefit of the labour of a perſon for a certain length of time, ought to contribute to the relief of that perſon in times of diſability. In the various laws which have been paſſed, and the deciſions which have taken place upon this branch of ſettlement, an infinite variety of ſubtleties and refinements has been introduced, in order to determine what ſort of ſervice ſhall conſtitute a ſettlement, agreeably to that principle; numberleſs diſtinctions, and ſhades of diſtinctions, have been made

made in that reſpect about hirings, ſervices, apprenticeſhip, and otherwiſe, while the principle itſelf remains perfectly clear and ſimple. If a pariſh has actually had the benefit of a perſon's labour for a given length of time, what matters it under what form or mode of engagement or ſervice it has done ſo? Is it not enough to ſay that in every caſe, where a perſon has been actually employed in a pariſh for a given length of time, ſuch a perſon ſhall be relieved in that pariſh, be the mode or form under which that ſervice may have been performed, whatever it may? In the neighbourhood of great manufacturing towns the effect of the law, as it now ſtands, in this reſpect is particularly ſevere. The towns employ the people, and have the full benefit of their labour; but, when diſtreſſed, they are ſent to the country pariſhes for relief, and become burdens upon the farmers, who do not employ them at all, and thereby occaſion an exceſſive increaſe of their rates, while the opulent manufacturer, enriched by the labour of thoſe people, is in a great meaſure exempt. Various collateral points will no doubt occur on this part of the ſubject, and which may ſeem, at firſt ſight, to militate againſt this obſervation; ſuch as ſervices with the ſame maſter in different pariſhes, perſons conſtantly changing their em-

employers, and otherwiſe, all of which are, however, eaſily reconcilable.

The foregoing obſervation applies of courſe only to ſingle perſons; with reſpect to married people and families, thoſe ſhould certainly not be allowed to gain ſettlements in ſo eaſy a way. As the law now ſtands, ſuch perſons may gain ſettlements by ſerving pariſh offices, paying pariſh rates, renting 10*l.* a year, or living upon their own eſtate. Each of theſe require ſome modification; but at preſent one inſtance only will be mentioned as more particularly ſtriking, which is, the ſettlement by renting 10*l.* a year: it is well known, that a tenement, worth 10*l.* a year in the reign of Charles II. is worth at leaſt four times that ſum now; if, therefore, renting 10*l.* a year was thought neceſſary at that time to gain a ſettlement, ſurely a renting for the ſame end now, ſhould be at an amount equal to the comparative difference in the value of money and property ſince that time. From the effect of the rule as it now ſtands, pariſhes are inceſſantly incumbered with numerous families, to the very great increaſe of their rates, from whom they can derive no poſſible benefit. By renting a garret at two ſhillings a week, and an apple ſtall at two ſhillings more, or either one or the other, or a barn, hay-loft, cart-houſe, or

any

any other trifling tenement, at ſuch a rent, a family, however numerous and diſtreſſed, are unremovable, and become, at the end of the ſhort ſpace of forty days, burdens upon the pariſh; and it is well known, that poor families are in the conſtant practice of taking tenements of this deſcription, for the avowed purpoſe of gaining ſettlements in any pariſh where they chooſe to fix themſelves.* It is alſo well known, that builders, and other ſpeculators, are conſtantly building, in many pariſhes, numberleſs little tenements, which they let out at high weekly rents to poor families of all deſcriptions, who very ſoon become chargeable, and fill the pariſhes with poor. The occupiers themſelves are too poor to pay any rates, and their wealthy landlords, not only ſtand exempt, but even exact a greater rent from theſe poor people, on the pretext of their not being aſked for rates; thereby making an exceſſive intereſt of their money, and loading the induſtrious pariſhioners with a grievous burden, to which the property itſelf does not all contribute. That the poor ſhould have habitations for their dwelling, cannot be denied; but that they ſhould be allowed to gain ſettlements in ſo eaſy a way, wherever

* This obſervation applies to populous towns, and particularly to the large pariſhes in London and its environs.

they think fit, ſeems repugnant to every principle of reaſon and policy, and tends totally to defeat the effect of that law, which was intended to prevent it. Equally unreaſonable is it, that the wealthy owners of theſe tenements, ſhould be deriving ſo conſiderable a benefit from them, without at all contributing to the burdens, which the numerous herds of poor they bring into a pariſh tend to create. Surely, therefore, that property ſhould be, ſome how, amenable to that contribution; and if the occupiers are too poor to pay it, thoſe who exact the rents of them ſhould: the pariſh of St. Botolph, Biſhopſgate within, and probably other pariſhes, have already local laws to that effect, the principle of which equally applies to all pariſhes, and ſhould be made the ſubject of a general law. The pariſh of Kenſington alone loſes near 400*l.* a year of its rates, from that ſingle cauſe, beſides being encumbered with a vaſt acceſſion of poor, from the numerous families which occupy that deſcription of premiſes within that pariſh.

Theſe, and many other points, which time will not now permit to be gone more fully into, have occurred, in which ſome material improvements might probably be made in the general ſyſtem of the poor laws; in forming any

any arrangement for that purpoſe, recourſe need only be had to the original fundamental principles, upon which thoſe laws have ariſen, and engrafting upon thoſe principles a ſyſtem ſuited to them, according to the various alterations which have, in proceſs of time, occurred in the general ſtate of things in this country. From ſuch a combination of original principles with preſent circumſtances, there ſeems little doubt, but that a ſimple, eaſy, and perfectly intelligible ſyſtem might be formed, which would at once wipe away all the difficulties and niceties at preſent ſubſiſting in them, and prevent thoſe numberleſs vexations, and expenſive diſputes and litigations between pariſhes, which are conſtantly ariſing from the preſent very embarraſſed ſyſtem of thoſe laws.

FINIS.

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Puniſh-

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